N° XIV.

THE THEATRICAL CENSOR.

BY A CITIZEN.

Now, if some man, more hardy than the rest,
Should dare attack these *gnatlings* in their nest,
At once they rise, with impotence of rage,
Whet their small stings, and buzz about the stage.

CHURCHILL.

Je vous l'ai déjà dit, aimez qu'on vous censure,
Et, souple à la raison, corrigez sans murmure.

BOILEAU.

Monday Evening, Feb. 24.

THE HONEY-MOON,

WITH MIRTH BY MOON-LIGHT, AND

THE LOCK AND KEY.

THE entertainments of this evening were for the benefit of Mrs. Wignell. The *Honey-Moon* was played for the first time on the Philadelphia theatre.

This comedy, like the more ancient ones in our language, is written in verse. We were, upon the whole, much gratified with the performance. Mrs. Wignell's *tamed shrew* was well played. Mr. Wood was at home in the *Duke Aranza*, and did the part great justice. Mrs. Wood both looked and played the part of *Zamora* in a very pleasing manner. Mrs. Cunningham's *Hostess* was altogether a little extravagant; but this must be imputed to the author. Mr. Francis's *apothecary* was humourously represented. Mrs. Woodham was very

pleasing. Mr. Jefferson's *Rolando*, though sometimes disfigured by that gentleman's habitual failing, was also adorned with many conspicuous beauties. In the first scene, we thought him by no means fortunate in representing the surly and sarcastic misogyny of the character; but, in many subsequent ones, he made ample amends. Though he was, perhaps, somewhat farcical in brandishing his sabre, he dropped it very elegantly. Of Mr. Jefferson's defects, and of his powers, our opinion is always the same. The first we think glaring, and the second, great. In *Rolando* he often displayed considerable taste. We have only to wish that he would cultivate this quality still more. He is much indebted to Nature, and he ought to afford her every assistance of art. Mr. Blisset gave a very finished piece of acting, amid, as we were truly sorry to hear and perceive, the severest ill state of health.

In whatever degree it may take from the merit of the author, it lessens but little the pleasure of the spectator, to know that the *Honey-Moon* is more the offspring of reading than of invention. The language is excellent, and the construction of the plot agreeable. We are not, however, in the number of those who are ready to defend the author in his contempt of the dramatic unities. In other respects, we do not scruple to adopt the language of a contemporary critic:

"Instead of one, there are three stories, and as many designs: a design to make a lively coquet play on the feelings of her lover; a design to ridicule and subdue a woman-hater; and a design to correct the haughty and angry temper of a termagant.

"This last is the principal design; and in the manner of executing it, the appropriate nature and pleasantry of the sentiments, and the flowing and frequently poetical diction of the author, the sterling merit of the play consists. The plan of the fable is so far from new, that it appears to be an absolute imitation of Shakspeare, not only in the characters of the Duke and Juliana, who are Catherine and Petruchio drawn in

a different point of view, but of Zamora, who is as truly a transcript of Viola in Twelfth Night. In the management of the principal plan, when the scene changes from the palace to the cottage, we are no less forcibly reminded of Rule a Wife and have a Wife, by Beaumont and Fletcher. The imitations through the whole play, of the authors of that age, are too numerous to be cited; but they are frequently so happily made, and often executed with such an air of originality, that instead of being blemishes, they seem to stamp a sterling merit, and to purify the dramatic gold that had so long and so basely been alloyed."

To the imitations here pointed out, we add another of Benedict and Beatrice, and another of Othello and Desdemona. The imitations in the language are also of frequent recurrence. We shall avail ourselves of some further and no less judicious observations from the same source:

"Of the execution of the three designs, it may be said, that the manner of taming the shrew, which is the chief, gratifies while it delights; that the ridicule thrown on the woman-hater, which the author appears to have intended to make no less effective, is sometimes insipid, and, in a place or two, offensive; and that the sportiveness of the coquet, in the third plan, is a relief to the moroseness of the shrew.

"An incident is introduced in the beginning of the fourth act, of a hostess and an apothecary, who conspire to cheat Balthazar, the father of the heroines, of his money, by giving him improper medicines after a fall from his horse, to detain him as a guest and patient; and of making him, after having listened to their scheme, oblige the apothecary to swallow his own drugs. This scene, altogether, is not well timed. Dramatic authors should remember that, to introduce an extravagant and almost farcical incident, unless it forcibly and naturally arise out of the subject, is always a very dangerous experiment.

" It is unfortunate that the most pernicious moral is inculcated by this comedy; that of deceiving the mind into virtue, or of doing harm, that good may be the result. The Duke, having married a shrew, descends to a continued course of deception, and, without any scruple, repeatedly tells direct falsehoods, that by these means he may reform his wife. The most clear and noble moralists have maintained, that good ends are not to be produced by bad means; and to induce men to make use of them is to administer poison to morality. It has too long been supposed, by dramatic writers, that the grossest falsehoods on the stage were merely sport; it ought rather to be plainly made evident that, when falsehood is practised, the consequences are evil.

" The three young ladies are all daughters of Balthazar; a painter, of whose great excellence in his art, or renown, not a word is said; how he came to have captains, counts, and dukes for sons-in-law, and how the three ladies are each so exceedingly different in character from the two others, may be questionable, but likewise may easily be overlooked. Truth requires it to be said of this comedy, that its merits and defects are each of them great, but that the merits are so uncommon, that the defects are cheerfully pardoned."

We cannot allow a very exalted rank to the sentiments or other poetical beauties of this play; but, they are respectable. They are frequently disgraced by an incongruous, and sometimes ridiculous, mixture of the lofty and familiar. We often find united, the sounding march of verse and the trivial diction of prose. We do not hesitate to say, that there are few of the lightest of our modern prose comedies in which we do not meet with more brilliance of thought and expression. The *Honey Moon* is, for the most part, correct; but it is elaborate: it smells of the oil. Take the following examples of what we have just said:

> I'll bear you company:
> And, as the traveller, perplex'd a while
> In the benighted mazes of a forest,

Breaks on a champaign country, smooth and level,
And sees the sunshine glorious, so shall you, *sir*,
Behold a bright close and a golden end
To this now dark adventure.

Who then, that has a taste for happiness,
Would live *in a large mansion*, only fit
To be a habitation for the winds;
Keep gilded ornaments for dust and spiders;
See ev'ry body, care for nobody;
Lose the free use of limbs, by being mewed up
In a close carriage, next to being bed-rid,
As if, like mummies, we should fall to pieces
By taking air; and, above all, be pester'd
With those voracious vermin call'd attendants?

The following is better:

Thus modestly attir'd,
A half-blown rose stuck in thy braided hair,
With no more diamonds than those eyes are made of,
No deeper rubies than compose thy lips,
Nor pearls more precious than *inhabit* them,
With the pure red and white which that same hand
That blends the rainbow mingles in thy cheeks,
This well-proportioned form (think not I flatter)
In graceful motion to harmonious sounds,
And thy free tresses dancing in the wind,—
Thou'lt fix as much observance, as chaste dames
Can meet, without a blush.

Those who are fond of satires on the sex will easily forgive, if they discover, any deficience of spirit in this speech of Rolando:

Count. Have you found it?
Rol. Humph! Not exactly. Something like a smoke-jack;
For it goes ever, without winding up:
But that wears out in time—there fails the simile.
Next I bethought me of a water-mill;
But that stands still on Sundays: woman's tongue
Needs no reviving Sabbath. And beside,
A mill, to give it motion, waits for grist:
Now, whether she has aught to say or no,
A woman's tongue will go for exercise.

In short, I came to this conclusion:
Most earthly things have their similitudes,
But woman's tongue is yet incomparable.

Of this play it is remarkable, that it was the only successful one of its author, and that it was not performed till after his death. Circumstances so peculiar unavoidably inspire a large portion of interest respecting the history of its production, which we shall give a sketch of in our next number.

LOCK AND KEY

was distinguished by some good singing by Mr. Woodham. Mr. Rutherford was more than usually successful.

The *Blind Bargain* on Wednesday Evening was played to a very numerous audience for the Benefit of Mr. Jefferson; and we are happy that Mr. Wood's benefit, on Friday Evening, yielded him a liberal reward for the pains he takes in the discharge of his duty. In *Rolla* he surpassed the expectation even of his friends; but we have ever been of opinion that Mr. Wood succeeds best in the lively walks of genteel comedy.

We lament, in common with a great number of persons who frequent the Theatre, that Mr. Harwood has been so much kept from public view. As an actor, in two or three lines, he stands unrivalled in this country. He is a man of education and talents, and merits the attention of the managers, and the support of every lover of chaste and natural acting. We sincerely hope, to remunerate him, in some measure, for the neglect he has suffered, that his benefit will be a *bumper*.

Mr. Cain has chosen the Play of *Romeo* and *Juliet* for his benefit on Monday Evening, and we have no doubt that his friends will make him a good house. Although we have been told that Mr. Cain is the author of some low abusive stuff in a wretched paper printed by a bookbinder in this city, we are not inclined to believe it; for, although we have

made some strictures on that gentleman's acting, which could not have been agreeable to him, it is not probable that he would so far disgrace himself as to write the following paragraphs against a person who is the supposed Editor of the Censor, and whose character and pretensions are far above the reach of the malignity of his enemies:

"When the last number of the Repository was handed to Polyglot Jack, he was engaged at supper, but Grumbo soon deprived him of appetite, for suddenly 'he crushed the paper, and thrust it, like an adder, in his bosom,'—then starting from his seat, paced the room with rapid strides, and with violent gestures, dismissed his attendants,—(journeymen, boys, and printer's devil) then sat him down, with horrid vacant stare, to peruse those 'damning truths' it contained.

"It is truly laughable to hear the praises lavished on the *erudite* Mr. Watts, by Mr. Dennie. The latter terms Watts 'the modern *Scaliger!*' and Jack, who cannot be surpassed in the art of servile flummery, or fawning syphocancy, dubbs Mr. Dennie the '*American Addison!*' Whether they really merit these glittering titles, I shall not take upon myself to say, but wish merely to observe, that Mr. Dennie to the character of a Gentleman, unites that of an accomplished scholar and an elegant writer. Watts, on the other hand, with all his pretensions, is one of the most ignorant, vain, dirty blackguards that ever put his foot on our shores, which may truly be said to be the asylum for the vagrants of every clime."

Our juvenile brother-critic of New-York, we find, is also upon bad terms with the play-folk. In the last Number of his 'Thespian Mirror,' we have the following letter, which is somewhat in the style of the entertaining *Ladies' Repository:*

MASTER EDDYTOR,

The Acktors Air verry much Displesd with your remarcks on thaire purformences, for they thinck everry thing That is say'd about thare *badness*——against them I am thairfour cum to ax you not to say notthing about the playrs if you cant say notthing *good*—for thay thinkes itt is a grate impurtenance for a *little buoy* to make his obbsurvasions Even in Caise thay air write—i am Not a Acktor, but a FRIND TO THEM.

Wenesday mon.
feb 12.

"A B C."——NOAH WEBSTER.

MR. CENSOR,

It is all over with poor P; and this is what I have been continually in fear of! It was of no avail that Solomon Slender, esquire, called upon him not to be intimidated; no, Sir! it was too late. It remains to be seen whether the kind words I employed last week will not have been more efficacious. Not a word of theatrical criticism in the *Repository!* This is a falling off, indeed!

I must condole with you, Sir, on the columns of *bad language* you have received from the *Repository;* but I have nothing else at present to communicate. If P. re-appear, I will not be invisible; if he launch out again, my little bark shall

> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale;

If, not, I bid you heartily farewel!

HORNBOOK.

TO READERS AND CORRESPONDENTS.

We had intended to enter into a copious examination of INQUISITOR'S remarks in the Port Folio; but, as we only differ materially in the meaning of the word *resolve*, we shall dismiss the subject with putting INQUISITOR in mind, that many modern as well as ancient writers have made frequent allusions to *dew*, as the state of man before his formation into flesh. Shakespear, falling into the same idea, makes Hamlet say,

> Oh! that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew.

The word *resolve* evidently meaning here returning to a state of fluidity, according to Arbuthnot. "Resolving is bringing a fluid, which is now concreted, into the state of fluidity again." And whatever we may call the fluid, certain it is, that the flesh of a deceased person shortly changes to a state of fluidity. Mr. Fennell, therefore, was correct in pronouncing the word *re-solve*, and at once discovered his knowledge of its meaning and derivation.

The price of this work is 50 cents for four numbers. To be had at No. 42, Walnut-street, and at Mr. Phillips's Circulating Library, south Fourth-street. Communications, and orders from the country, received at the former place.